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ABSTRACT

Standardized testing for large-scale assessment in Mississippi has changed to include both selected-response and performance-based formats for the past 3 academic years. The purpose of this followup study was to examine the perceptions of practicing teachers who belonged to a professional reading organization in the state with regard to this new format. The new Mississippi Assessment System (MAS), its extent, and its impact on teacher judgment, modifications to classroom instruction, and nontraditional and traditional assessment were assessed. A two-part questionnaire was developed to collect demographic data and information about teachers' perceptions. Participants were 197 teachers for kindergarten through grade 12, administrators, and university professors located throughout Mississippi. Data were analyzed using regression analyses. Quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that teachers' perceptions support the current changes in the MAS combining traditional and nontraditional formats. Participants indicated a recognition of the need for change in their classroom instruction to prepare children better for the new and more challenging test formats. The questionnaire is attached. (Contains three tables and eight references.) (SLD)

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Running Head: MRA ASSESSMENT PERCEPTIONS

ED 406 423

Mississippi Reading Teachers' Perceptions Toward the Interpretation of Results from Reformed Standardized Assessment in Mississippi

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Abstract

Standardized testing, for large scale assessment in Mississippi, has changed to include both selected-response and performance-based formats for the past three academic years. The purpose of this follow-up study was to examine the perceptions of practicing teachers who belonged to a professional reading organization in the State with regard to this new format. The new Mississippi Assessment System (MAS), and its extent as well as impact on teacher judgement, modifications to classroom instruction, and non-traditional as well as traditional assessment formats were assessed. A two-part questionnaire was developed to collect both demographic and teachers' perceptions data. Participants were 197 K-12 teachers, administrators, and university professors located throughout Mississippi.

Data were analyzed using regression analyses. Quantitative and qualitative findings indicated that teachers' perceptions support the current changes in the Mississippi Assessment System combining traditional and non-traditional testing formats. Participants indicated a recognition of the need for change in their classroom instruction to better prepare children for the new more challenging testing formats.

Mississippi Reading Teachers' Perceptions Toward the Interpretation of Results from Reformed Standardized Assessment in Mississippi

Introduction

In the fall of 1994, the state of Mississippi implemented the first phase of a new statewide assessment system designed to dramatically alter classroom instruction while providing results to be used for accountability purposes as prescribed in MS Code 37-16-1. For many years, Mississippi had followed a traditional testing format limited to selected response items, with the exception of the direct writing component of the Functional Literacy Exam. After much study and consideration, a broader more challenging, performance-based model was designed primarily by practicing teachers and adopted to go into effect during the fall 1994 academic year. This shift in focus from a narrow vision of norm-referenced testing previously limited to selected response format, to include more performance-based assessment, was considered necessary. The long-standing, narrow measure of a limited number of skills which produced primarily normative data only, was determined to be much too constricting for teachers to utilize in developing appropriate, meaningful instructional formats for students. Thus, a broader performance-based model (60% selected-response and 40% performance-based) was considered to be more characteristic of the learning process taking place in most classrooms and more advantageous for assisting with

appropriate instructional formats. More specifically, the design of this new model incorporated 60% selected response (multiple choice) items and 40% performance (constructed response) items.

A pilot study conducted by Howe and Thames (1996) investigated Mississippi teachers' perceptions of the new non-traditional Mississippi Assessment System (MAS). Their results indicated that teachers supported the changes to the MAS format, as a means of necessary educational reform to facilitate change in classroom instruction and new classroom assessment formats. Further, their findings suggested that this change encouraged teachers to select appropriate teaching strategies and assisted them in designing curriculum and education programs that reflected sound instructional practice.

Effective instructional formats, or curriculum design, which focus on student's individual needs, demand alternative assessment formats. However, the traditional norm-referenced assessment format did not lend itself to assist teachers to this end. As all assessments are assessments of reading, to some degree, reading assessment must require the performance of exemplary tasks (Wiggins, 1989) expected of students not only in the classroom setting but in the real-world scenario.

Recent reading research conducted by Murphy (1995) suggested that assessment formats which are both portfolio and performance-based in nature contain certain aspects of both standardized and norm-referenced formats. Performance-based assessment does not

imply non-standardization. Indeed, it lends itself to both standardization and individuality. With performance assessment documentation, the classroom teacher not only obtains the documented data to support instructional change but finds the data to support normative measures.

Some research (DeLain, 1995; Tibbetts, Peterson & Yumori, 1992; Jones, Shake, & Stinnett, 1994; Murphy, 1995) has been conducted that concentrated on the "revisioning" of new reading assessment formats (e.g., authentic and portfolio assessment), but few studies have been conducted that investigated reading teachers' perceptions of these new, non-traditional assessment formats. Given that all state mandated assessments require reading, the researchers desired to investigate how Mississippi teachers, specifically, those who belong to the state reading association, perceived the changes to the new non-traditional MAS format.

Method

Design

The purpose of this study was to examine reading teachers', in the state of Mississippi, perceptions of the new Mississippi Assessment System (MAS). The extent and impact of this system with regard to modifications of teacher judgement, classroom instruction, and school/classroom non-traditional assessment/program evaluation were also investigated.

Combined quantitative and qualitative designs, using a two-part questionnaire and teacher written responses, were developed to collect demographic data related to teachers' perceptions of the new non-traditional Mississippi Assessment System (MAS) format. The first part of the two-part questionnaire contained 14 items which addressed some of the following: teacher experience and grade level assignment, teachers' academic level, gender, professional affiliations, and MAS training received prior to the administration of the new assessment.

The second part of the two-part questionnaire, developed by the researchers, contained 21 questions related to teacher judgement (11 items), instruction (5 items), and assessment (5 items). Input from concerned Mississippi classroom teachers and content found in current curriculum formed the basis for each item. The questionnaire was distributed to reading teachers, who are members of the state reading association. Respondents marked their responses that best reflected their professional opinion. A Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5, was used to score this instrument with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 5 representing "strongly agree."

Content and face validity on the questionnaire were determined by a panel of experts from the areas of assessment and curriculum. Authorities on the panel judged each item as to the degree of accuracy, clarity, and completeness as related to item abilities to assess teachers' perceptions regarding the new

Mississippi Assessment System, in three categories of judgement, instruction, and assessment. The questionnaire was revised based on the recommendations of each panel member.

Subjects

Participants were 197 K-12 teachers, who belong to the state reading association. This number also included classroom teachers and reading specialists with teaching experiences ranging from 1 to 25 years. Approximately 1,200 respondents were randomly selected from the state reading membership to receive the questionnaire, and 1/6 of that population returned responses.

The investigation was conducted during the 1995-96 academic year, after the MAS results for that year were disseminated to all participating schools in the statewide assessment. At this time, respondents had received two years of staff development training in procedures regarding administration and interpretation of test results. In addition, staff development which focused on instructional and curriculum design had also been implemented. All training for new and existing teachers was completed prior to the administration of the MAS in October, which was offered to teachers in a variety of formats, including workshops, staff meetings, and/or printed packets describing the new testing format.

Procedure

The investigation was conducted during the 1995-1996

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academic year. A cover letter explaining the procedures and purpose of the study, the two-part questionnaire, and a self-addressed, return-stamped envelope for the questionnaire was sent to each participant. All surveys were requested for return one month after receipt of the questionnaire. A postcard reminder was sent to all members who had not returned surveys by the designated deadline.

Quantitative Results

The purpose of the analysis was to explore and identify group differences in the sample population; initially a multivariate approach was used as multivariate statistics can determine if groups differ with respect to a given linear combination of the multiple dependent variables. Results indicated a difference in groups with respect to the linear combination; therefore, a combination of univariate testing and additional multivariate procedures were computed to determine the specific dimension of group difference.

Differences in Judgement, Instruction, and Assessment

A one-factor multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was computed which suggested that significant differences existed between the predictor variables (demographic variables) and the criterion variables of judgement, instruction and assessment (Rc=.615, p<.05). From these results, nine demographic variables, which include Gender, Years Experience, Educational Level, Grade

Taught, Professional Affiliation, Workshop Attendance, Workshop Benefit, Administered Informal Assessments, Staff Development, Usefulness, and Colleague involved in MAS were specified for further statistical analyses.

Significant differences were found for 3 of the 9 demographic or combined dependent variables as shown in Table 1. Significant differences were found for Workshop Benefit, Administered Informal Assessments, and Usefulness.

To further investigate the within-group difference of the demographic variables, univariate F-tests were conducted. A significant within-group difference was found for the independent variables of (a) usefulness, (b) helpfulness, (c) report form is similar to previously administered assessments, and (d) staff development on the criterion variable of teacher judgement. As shown in Table 3, a significant difference was found between the criterion variable of usefulness and the predictor variables of benefit, previously administered informal assessments, and staff development. These results suggest that (a) teacher workshops focusing on the MAS benefit teachers' understanding of the new assessment format, (b) the administration of informal assessments assist in preparation and planning of instruction for the classroom, and (c) staff development assists in interpreting data from the MAS.

A significant difference was found between the predictor

variables of gender, colleague involved in MAS, report form is similar to previously administered assessments, and the criterion variable of Helpfulness (Table 3). These results suggest that gender, knowing a colleague involved in the development of the MAS, and the similarities of previously administered assessments influenced teacher judgement.

The univariate F-Tests also indicated that a significant difference was found for predictor variables of benefit and previously administered informal assessments. These results suggest that the benefit of attending MAS workshops and previously administered informal assessments influenced teacher judgement and staff development.

As a significant difference was also found between the criterion variable of instruction, a significant difference was found for the independent variables of class and the predictor variable planning of instruction. A second significant difference was found for the criterion variable of instruction, and the independent variables of students selection of appropriate instructional practices and predictor variables of years of teaching and educational level (see Table 3). These results suggest that instructional change was influenced by planning effective strategies for classroom use. Years of teaching a specific grade and the educational level of the teacher influenced the selection of appropriate instructional practices.

Table 3 also shows that a significant difference was found

on the criterion variable of assessment and the independent variable of student strengths and weaknesses and predictor variable of formal assessment. Also, a significant difference was found between the independent variables of changes in instruction and benefit on the criterion variable of assessment. These results suggest that students' specific strengths and weaknesses are more evident through the use formal assessment, while changes in classroom instruction is benefited through the use of classroom assessment..

Qualitative Results

Qualitative data were obtained from reading teachers' comments written on the questionnaires, which supported the quantitative data. Reading teachers promoted the notion that the new MAS is useful in evaluating reading programs. In addition, teachers stated that the individual scores of the MAS were more beneficial than school building and district results. Very few teachers used the MAS to group students for reading classes. A limited number of teachers did not have training in interpreting test data which made the results less effective in planning effective classroom instruction. Teachers did express concern regarding the timing of returned results for the MAS, believing that these results would be more beneficial if the results could be returned to each school much sooner in the academic year.

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Table 1
Summary and Results of MANOVA Criterion

Factor	Canonical	F Value	P Value
Gender	.211	1.059	.407
Years Experience	.166	.785	.730
Educational Level	.162	.766	.751
Grade Taught	.215	1.080	.385
Professional Affiliation	.156	.731	.790
Workshop Attendance	.129	.583	.919
Workshop Benefit	**.375**	2.376*	**.003**
Administered Informal Assessments	**.388**	2.505*	**.002**
Formal Assessment	.248	1.301	.199
Staff Development	.259	1.381	.152
Usefulness	**.374**	2.359*	**.003**
Colleague	.250	1.315	.190

p<.05

Table 2
Factor Acronyms

Teacher Perceptions	MAS	
	Interpret Scores	MAS-IS
	CBD Results	MAS-CBD
	Admin/Dist	
	Training	MAS-AD/D-T
	Support	MAS-AD/D-S
	Usefulness	MASU
	Helpfulness	MASH
	Report format	
	Understanding	MAS-RFU
	Interpreting	MAS-RFI
	Similarity to previous assessments	MAS-RFS
	Staff development	MAS-SD
Instructional Change	Class Profiles	
	Selection of appropriate instructional practices	CP-SAIP
	Planning of instruction	CP-PI
	Student Profiles	
	Planning of instruction	SP-PI
	Building & District Profiles	
	Selection of appropriate instructional practices	BDP-SAIP
Assessment	MAS	
	Planning and diagnosis	MAS-PD
	Evaluating programs	MAS-EP
	Grouping	MAS-GR
	Strengths and weaknesses	MAS-SW
	Changes in instructional strategies	MAS-CIS
	Teachers' needs	MAS-TN

Table 3
Summary of Regression Analyses

	Criterion																			
	Teacher Perceptions										Instructional Change				Assessment					
						MAS					Class		Student		MAS					
	IS	CBD	A/D-T	A/D-S	U	H	RFU	RFI	RFS	SD	SAIP	PI	PI	SAIP	PD	EP	GR	SW	CIS	TN
Predictor																				
Gender	--	--	--	--	--	.027	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Years of Teaching	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.023	--	--	--	--	--	--
Educational Level	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.040	--	--	--	--	--	--
Grade Taught	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.030	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Professional Affiliation	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Workshop Attendance	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Benefit	--	--	--	--	.017	--	--	--	--	.002	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.001	--
Administered informal Assessments	--	--	--	--	.000	--	--	--	--	.012	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Formal Assessment	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.048	--	--
Staff Development	--	--	--	--	.001	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Usefulness	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.021	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Colleague involved in MAS	--	--	--	--	--	.036	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

$p<.05$

Discussion

The results of the regression analysis from the questionnaire responses revealed that there were 9 demographic contributors, those being Gender, Educational Level, Grade Taught, Workshop Benefit, Administered Informal Assessments, Formal Assessments, Staff Development, Usefulness, and Knowing a Colleague Involved in the Development of the MAS, which influenced teachers' judgements, instructional change, and assessment/program evaluation. There was also a significant relationship found between workshop benefit and the 21 criterion variables used in the questionnaire. This finding would suggest that attending workshops for the purpose of interpreting the new test scores, and teacher-made and other informal assessment formats were beneficial and had a direct impact upon teachers' judgements, instructional change, and assessment/program evaluation. These results, when coupled with the qualitative outcomes, appear to suggest that Mississippi reading teachers perceive the change in the new statewide assessment, from traditional or strictly norm-referenced to include non-traditional, performance-based assessment, as necessary education reform to support a change in classroom instruction and new classroom assessment formats.

Teachers' responses indicated that effective use of data collected from the MAS could assist them in selecting appropriate teaching strategies and possibly in designing curriculum and

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education programs which reflect the experiences and needs of their students. According to Gullickson (1984), assessment that corresponds with students' background experiences is effective in the classroom. Almasi, Afflerbach, Burthei, and Schafer (1995) supported the notion of effective curriculum design and appropriate teaching strategies that reflect cognitive processes.

It is also important to note that knowing a colleague who was instrumental in the developmental stages of the MAS, and teaching experience were also found to be important factors relating to the new MAS. These findings suggest that teachers, who were involved in developing portions of the MAS, possessed an understanding of the cognitive processes, a component of the new MAS. Further, these findings support the conceptual design of the system which recognized the essential role of classroom teachers as primary stakeholders in Mississippi's large-scale assessment program.

Limitations

A possible limitation, with regard to this study, is the small sample size. Approximately 5% of the reading association membership, randomly selected to participate, responded to the questionnaire. To effectively examine the teachers' perceptions, a larger sample selection should be involved.

Further investigations of reading teachers' perceptions regarding the specific reading and language arts portions of the

MAS would provide information for possible changes in those respective segments of the MAS. In addition, future studies regarding preservice teachers' perceptions toward the MAS would indicate their familiarity with the statewide assessment and provide needed information regarding future staff development training for novice teachers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study support the fact that reading teachers' perceptions indicate they are receptive to a shift from traditional, standardized, norm-referenced assessment to a combined format incorporating performance-based assessment. Teachers' perceptions also indicate that they anticipate changes in classroom instruction and teaching strategies that are used in daily instruction. As a result of the transition to the new MAS, information yielded from these assessments will provide teachers with the necessary knowledge to change their instructional practices to meet their students' needs. Thus, Mississippi reading teachers have a desire for educational reform that will satisfy state and local requirements, but that will simultaneously benefit their student populations.

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Mississippi Assessment System Questionnaire

This questionnaire consists of two parts: Part I is designed to obtain demographic information about the respondents. Part II solicits specific responses about the Mississippi Assessment System (MAS) norm-referenced assessments administered in the Fall of 1994. It is important that you answer each question. You are encouraged to provide narrative comments; these will be very helpful when completing the analysis. Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire. Remember, complete anonymity is a feature of this study.

Part I

Demographics:

Please respond to the following:

1. Gender: ① Male ② Female 2. Years of teaching _____

3. Educational Level: ❍ B.Sci./Arts ❍ M. Ed. ❍ PhD.

4. Current grade taught: (K) ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧
   ❍ Self-contained
   ❍ Departmentalized If departmentalized, subject(s) taught: _____
   Years experience on current grade: _____

   ❍ Freshman ❍ Sophomore ❍ Junior ❍ Senior
   Subject taught: ❍ English ❍ Subject area _____ (Subject identification)
   Years experience on current grade: _____

   Chapter 1 teacher: ❍ Yes ❍ No
   Years experience on current grade: _____

   ❍ Junior College Subject(s) taught: ❍ Reading ❍ English ❍ Language Arts
   ❍ College/University Subject(s) taught: ❍ Reading ❍ English ❍ Language Arts
   ❍ Undergraduate ❍ Graduate

5. Do you belong to any professional educational organizations? If yes, please list them.

6. List reading courses taken and level: (Omit if you teach at a college/university.)

7. Have you attended any workshops or staff development on interpreting the test scores for the Mississippi Assessment System?
❍ Yes ❍ No
(If no, go to item 10)

8. What kind of training did you receive?
❍ workshop ❍ packet/printed description ❍ staff meeting

Who conducted the training?
❍ Someone from your school ❍ Someone from your district ❍ Individual(s) outside your district

9. If yes, did you consider the workshop to be beneficial or not? If yes, who conducted the workshop(s)? ❍ local administrators ❍ fellow teachers
❍ team consisting of teacher and administrator ❍ other (please specify) _____

10. Have you attended any staff development activities about the MAS other than the two days provided by the state? ❍ Yes ❍ No
Please provide a brief description.

11. Have you administered any informal assessments this year? ❍ Yes ❍ No

12. Have you administered any standardized assessments prior to the 1994-1995 school year? ❍ Yes ❍ No
If yes, what were they?

13. How useful were the assessments for classroom planning and instructional practice? ❍ Not useful ❍ Somewhat useful ❍ Very useful

14 Do you have a colleague who was instrumental in the development stages of the MAS? ❍ Yes ❍ No

Directions: Read the following statements, and indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding the Mississippi Assessment System (MAS) scores for your class.

Part II: (Select one best answer that reflects the strength of agreement or disagreement).

Strongly Disagree = 1 Disagree = 2 No Definite Opinion = 3 Agree = 4 Strongly Agree = 5

1.	A teacher must interpret the scores of the Mississippi Assessment System in order to assist his/her class and each student.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ SD SA	Comment:
2.	It is important for me to know the class, building, and district results of the MAS.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ SD SA	Comment:
3.	A teacher must be trained in interpreting the scores of the MAS.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ SD SA	Comment:
4.	The information provided on the class profiles and student profiles will assist me in selecting appropriate instructional practices for my class and individual students.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ SD SA	Comment:
5.	The training provided by the administration/district on the new MAS assisted me in interpreting the results of my class and individual students.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ SD SA	Comment:
6.	The information provided on the student profile is important for the planning of instruction for my students.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ SD SA	Comment:
7.	The information provided on the class profile is important for the planning of instruction for my students.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ SD SA	Comment:

8.	The building profile will be as useful as the student and class profiles for me as the classroom teacher.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ SD SA	Comment:
9.	The new MAS will be as helpful to me as the previous assessment.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ SD SA	Comment: (Please note if you cannot recall the old assessment.)
10.	The reporting format of the MAS results was easy to understand.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ SD SA	Comment:
11.	The reporting format of the MAS was easier to interpret than the previous assessment.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ SD SA	Comment:
12.	The district profiles were as helpful as the class and building profiles in selecting appropriate instructional practices.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ SD SA	Comment:
13.	The MAS data are more useful for planning or diagnosis than the previous assessment.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ SD SA	Comment:
14.	Interpreting class and student profiles was made easier by the support from the administration/district.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ SD SA	Comment:
15.	The new MAS will be useful in evaluating building and class programs.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ SD SA	Comment:
16.	Further staff development is necessary for interpreting MAS test results and incorporating results into classroom instruction.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ SD SA	Comment:

17.	MAS scores were used to group my students in reading, language, and math.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ SD SA	Comment:
18.	Assessment data will help me to identify strengths and weaknesses in my instructional program.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ SD SA	Comment:
19.	The new MAS will prompt me to make changes in instructional strategies based upon analysis of assessment results.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ SD SA	Comment:
20.	The format of the new assessments looked more similar to my classroom assessments than did previous assessments.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ SD SA	Comment:
21.	In order to promote a greater match between student success as measured by MAS and classroom instruction, a careful assessment of teachers' needs is essential.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ SD SA	Comment:

END

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